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# Eyes on 'rainy day fund' for transit

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State Sen. Robert Burns looked at a state roadmap, held out his palm and decided it was raining.

On Thursday, Burns announced his intent to seek \$450 million from the state's "rainy day fund" to speed up transportation projects.

The proposal from the chairman of the Senate's Appropriations Committee hit like a thunderclap, drawing mixed reaction.

Burns said the money would help boost a sorely lagging transportation plan and, when coupled with more than \$400 million directed toward accelerated road building last year, get the state on the path to catching up with its growth.

"Today it is raining people and cars in Arizona, and this is a wise use of taxpayers' dollars," Burns said in a news release.

But while admiring the boldness of the plan, not everyone is sure the rainy day fund is the right pot of money. The fund was created years ago to buffer the state budget against tough financial times. It's a way of saving for the proverbial rainy day.

"I think it's an excellent start," said Martin Shultz, who is involved with a group of business and government officials working on a long-term transportation strategy for the state. "But we have to sort out the proper source of funds."

Shultz said he envisions debates over whether \$450 million would be too deep of a cut in the fund, which currently has more than \$600 million. It also could touch off a scramble from other lawmakers and interest groups to tap the fund for their own pet projects.

Gov. Janet Napolitano's office is cool to the idea that the rainy day fund is the place to find more money for transportation.

"The whole notion of the rainy day fund is to save it for when it's raining," said Mike Haener, the governor's deputy chief of staff and legislative advisor. "And it's not raining yet. Not economically."

Burns' proposal, Senate Bill 1049, is scheduled for its first hearing Tuesday before the Senate Appropriations Committee. The meeting begins at 1:30 p.m. in the Senate building, 1700 W. Washington St.

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